100 mm
A5
1.0
1.1
1.25
1.4
1.6
2.8
2.5
3.2
2.2
3.6
2.0
4.0
1.8
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890
1.0 mm
1.5 mm
2.0 mm

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 137 CS 211 128

AUTHOR Page, Miriam Dempsey
TITLE The Anthropologist as Essayist: Clifford Geertz.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 33p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (39th, St. Louis, MO, March 17-19, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Book/Product Reviews (072)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Anthropology; Cultural Context; *Essays; *Ethnography; Expository Writing; *Personal Narratives; *Writing (Composition)
IDENTIFIERS Cultural Anthropology; Geertz (Clifford); Story Themes; Story Writing; Thematic Analysis; Writing Development

ABSTRACT

Based on the premise that the most viable form of discovery for the ethnographer is the personal essay--which has been called "the expression of the self thinking" (Alfred Kazin) or writing as learning and thinking--this paper examines the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz in the light of that definition. Particular attention is paid to his idea of "local knowledge" (or theme) and "thick description," as exemplified by his 1980 ethnography, "Negara," which reveals the anthropologist telling many stories within the context of a highly focused theme to help deal with the complexity of composing human experience, especially that of a "strange" society. The paper contends that the ethnographer's struggles to come to terms with a "strange" society make socio-cultural anthropology an ideal area to study the personal essay because of the revealing interpenetration of language and experience. The paper also remarks that the increasing tendency toward thematic ethnography reflects a growing awareness among ethnographers of the "primacy of context." The first part of the paper explores the theoretical premise of writing as learning and thinking as the only option really open to the ethnographer because of the nature of the ethnographic writing task as highly thematic and interpretive. The second part uses Geertz's "Negara" (a study of the "theatre state" in nineteenth century Bali) as an example of this premise, and to show that the layers of interpretation in his intricately written ethnography enact Geertz's primary aim, "deep writing" and "deep reading," an essential goal for any anthropologist who tries to come to terms with the meaning of human experience. Forty-two references are appended. (MS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Miriam Dempsey Page
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED293137

The Anthropologist as Essayist: Clifford Geertz

My primary concern in this study will be the interaction of writing and understanding in composing texts. These texts (Dominick LaCapra calls them "interplays of forces" (LaCapra 23-71)) I am going to call "essays." And the particular kind of essay I will consider is that which is continually finding itself within this "interplay of forces." Montaigne is its progenitor, and in it the essayist comes to terms with what he or she discovers. This kind of essay, writes Alfred Kazin, is

> peculiarly personal...not because it is necessarily about the self, but because it is an expression of the self thinking. ...It is above all...not the 'subject' that counts...for this subject might have been arrived at by anyone. It is the subject arrived at by the writer, as it has grown in his thought (1961:x-xi).The more deeply committed the writer is to his subject the more he puts himself into relationship with it; then there will appear to his mind, as he writes, what one can only call the hidden issue, the deeper issue, the unexpected issue--pressing for our awareness--the issue that really becomes one to the individual writing the essay (Kazin, 1965:viii).

CS211132

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Commitment (or "the force of the writer's concern with the subject" (Kazin, 1965, vii)) encourages a probing, exploratory, questioning manner that would be open to the revelations only the personal or familiar essay would provide."Whether {the essayist} writes in the first person or not," Bernard Jefferson noted in an early study of this essay form (Jefferson xiii), "he reveals himself; without reservation he takes us into his confidence; he makes familiar to us the peculiar stamp of his personality and the rarities of his temper...hence the familiar essay." We see a deeply engaged writer working towards insight in this essay form.

This is not to say that essays, such as Sir Francis Bacon's, which typically read as commentaries on experience already well understood, did not involve commitment. Bacon, in fact, saw his mission as essayist to be that of counselor on issues in which he deeply believed. But his essays are more stimuli to thought than revelations of thought itself. Bacon favors an aphoristic, antithetical style that would lead a reader to fill in the gaps--what Warhaft (5) describes as "invitation to 'expectant inquiry'" (5). The deductive approach, of which Bacon disapproved for the most part, assumed completeness. Bacon's essays (though a few tended toward completeness) were an attempt to bring together fragments of knowledge within an essay that would stimulate his readers toward further inquiry.

Despite the invitational quality of Bacon's essays, however, they reflect a writer who has already come to terms with the subject himself. In Montaigne's essays the writer knows as little what is around the next corner as the reader.

The Anthropologist as Essayist: Clifford Geertz

Like Odysseus, the personal essayist is an adventurer-writer, a voyager, grappling with the subject, always in search of the elusive Proteus, who is slippery, cunning, swift, sometimes overpowering--"to take him by surprise and hold him" (THE ODYSSEY, Book 4, l.389), at least momentarily. But the reader of the personal essay sets out as well on an odyssey toward meaning--not just any reader,but one equipped to stand his or her own in the dialogue or dialectic, one who will relish the occasional surprise, the twists and turns of the argument, who is willing to wrestle this hoary Proteus to get him to surrender the secrets of the deep. It is a "narrative disclosure of thought" (Gass 25) as discovery and interpretation converge in composing the essay.

The writer of the personal essay does not often stop to document allusions or names in passing. The reader who must have common footing in this case does so with a writer whose purpose is to discover his or her own personal response to the situation, not to cite the thoughts of others.To be "the same age as {the personal} essayist" (Gass 37) means to engage in an exploratory dialectic that forms the essay as it proceeds.This essay form's life blood, then, is not what is being said as much as the interactive process that creates it and sustains it for both writer and reader.

Socio-cultural anthropology is an ideal area to study this form of the essay because of the revealing interpenetration of language and experience as an ethnographer struggles to come to terms with a "strange" society. The personal essay--"self

thinking" or a "narrative disclosure of thought"--may be the form for most closely "construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical" (Geertz, 1975:5), although these complexities often elude understanding and understanding often eludes words and other symbol systems.

Ironically, a key value of personal essays is that they form themselves into "spots of time" (Wordsworth), momentary gestures, if you will, within the complex historical process of the imaginative or interpretive field. The interpretive anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, has described writing as 'a way to get it down for now' (LOCAL KNOWLEDGE, 1983). In a 1984 interview (Hamilton and Weiland, University of Iowa) he referred to himself, in fact, as an "essayist" or a "short-distance runner" and to his early preference as an aspiring writer for the short story. (See Susan Lohafer's probing analysis (COMING TO TERMS WITH THE SHORT STORY, 1983), which reflects a distinct affinity between the localized forms of the short story and the essay. Although she does not discuss the essay, she does stress "a {similar} resistance to closure" in the short story, yet shows with her analogy of a "sentence" that "entering" the moment of the short story, going "through" it, and "leaving" it, finally, give it its highly thematic energy. Rust Hills' WRITING IN GENERAL AND THE SHORT STORY IN PARTICULAR (1977) earlier explored the notion of plotlessness or character diffusion, for example, seen in contemporary variations on the form, but both Lohafer and Hills emphasize the "moment" as the definitive pivot, finally, of a short story.) My interests as a student of literary theory and

as a writing teacher have led me to the personal essay in anthropological literature where this resistant interaction between writing and understanding, which would probe to the moment of a short story, is even more present. The anthropologist, Kenneth Read, describes the experience of the ethnographer in the field as "confrontation"(ix)--when the writer in coming to terms, perhaps, with his or her understanding of the people "captures" them, but only momentarily--as "butterflies...in flight"(ix).

The personal essay in anthropology forms itself, then, in terms of what Clifford Geertz has described as "local knowledge"--highly focused theme and "thick description." In reading and writing culture as "text," this essayist builds on a probing and exploratory impulse that considers what seems to be the story in its "moment"in time, in its context or community through multi-levels of interpretation , including the irregularities. Clifford Geertz, to whom I shall return, finally, for an extended discussion of his 1980 ethnography, NEGARA, is a striking example of the increasing preference in contemporary cultural anthropology for this form of the essay. He sees ethnographic writing as "highly thematic" (1984, Hamilton and Weiland) and interpretive. Knowledge for the cultural anthropologist, according to Geertz, derives from understanding how the people understand themselves in the complexities of their daily living.

To write each of these stories, as he intimated in the interview, is to return time after time to his thousands of field

notes for new insights, new interpretations, at times re-indexing the same material, for new ways to write the story or new stories to write out of the same data. In other words, he does not try to tell the whole "story" in one essay; he is content with stories, treatment of different themes, essays. The people remain always before him as he continues with each revision or each new essay to try to understand how they understand their experience.

Although the traditional province of ethnography has been with a simpler society, where the possibility of focusing on local meaning is more easily available, perhaps, ethnographers have not all been inclined to particularity. From the comparative anthropology and unilinear evolutionary theories of nineteenth century anthropologists, such as E.B. Tylor (PRIMITIVE CULTURE) and Lewis Henry Morgan (ANCIENT SOCIETY), to the early decades of the twentieth century, human behavior was studied primarily in terms of general laws. With the pioneering Particularist school of Franz Boas (Benedict, Kroeber, Lowie, Mead, and others), however, "Culture" began to translate into "cultures," although the tendency even there was to superimpose normative constructs over the variety of local experience. But because of its elect role in studying human experience, anthropology was to share acutely in the intellectual revolution that was to take over the twentieth century--the movement away from an emphasis on general laws in describing human behavior to an emphasis on interpretation from local perspectives. Sullivan and Rabinow have written that "the primacy of context" or "the interpretive turn..refocuses attention on the concrete varieties of cultural

meaning in their particularity and complex texture"(31-32)."The penetration of the social sciences by the views of such philosophers {as Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur}," writes Geertz, "makes any simple return to a technological conception of those sciences highly improbable" (LOCAL KNOWLEDGE, introduction, 3-4), a movement away, in short, from the earlier positivistic notions of describing human behavior with the general laws borrowed from the natural sciences. Geertz adds, "My own work, insofar as it is more than archival (a function of anthropology much underrated), represents an effort to edge my way into odd corners of this discussion" (LOCAL KNOWLEDGE, introduction, 5).

There were a few essays among ethnographies before the 1950s, however, that were thematic. None achieve the searching quality in an ethnography like Geertz's NEGARA (1980) (to which most of my attention will be directed), but all urge toward the need for theme to begin to come to terms with the complexities of their roles as story-tellers. For the purposes of my study here, then, which focuses on the current tendency toward the personal essay in ethnographic writing, particularly the work of Clifford Geertz, I will discuss each only briefly.

Bronislaw Malinowski's ARGONAUTS OF THE WESTERN PACIFIC (1922), for example, focuses on the theme of the kula (the Massim exchange system). Malinowski suggests the rich scope of Melanesian life--religion, economics, gardening, etc.--as he focuses on the pivotal exchange ritual that relates to all other facets of their culture. The digressions into ethnographic

detail, which makes ARGONAUTS appear similar to ethnography that is nothing more than a "dumping ground," do not violate the structure of ARGONAUTS as a thematic work. Like a "still point in a turning world" (T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton") the annual kula voyage in which the kula partners exchanged the symbolic items--spondylus shell necklaces and arm-shell bracelets--centers a story that is told in terms of the voyage.

The economic and spiritual exchange system derived, I am suggesting, from vegetation cults pervasive in the islands. Originating in Egypt and Western Asia, with later adaptations in Greek and Roman mythology, the rituals surrounding the decay (death) and germination (resurrection) of vegetation enacted the affirmation of life through death and the interdependence of Self and Other. In the Trobriand Islands the cults became gardening rituals (See Malinowski's CORAL GARDENS AND THEIR MAGIC, 1935) in which "striking the soil" to expel evil spirits before planting, for example, was an analogue to "transferring evil" (See James Frazer's THE GOLDEN BOUGH and T.S. Eliot's THE WASTELAND)--a corollary rite to "killing the god" or "the priestly {or "fisher" king." The exchange of kula items ("objective correlatives," Eliot) was the culminating symbolic action to affirm the need for sacrifice in connecting the Self to Other--in short, the need for human community and the ultimate need for the Divine.

As an essay, ARGONAUTS is somewhat diffuse because of the long digressions into discussions of cultural elements. It is clear, however, in this pioneering essay of an anthropologist who is trying to understand a "strange" culture (note his long

introduction about the need for careful fieldwork) that Malinowski is searching for a way to tell this story. An essay, writes William Gass (25) turns "round and round upon its topic, exposing," savoring the idea. Although Malinowski seems to lose track of his point at times, his circular theme becomes metaphor for the motion that informs (my italics) his essay and his own voyage as adventurer-writer to find it.

Another ethnography that is thematic, appearing shortly after ARGONAUTS in 1922, is Margaret Mead's COMING OF AGE IN SAMOA (1928). Her essay turns on a "problem." Sent by her teacher, Franz Boas, to the Samoan Islands to do a comparative study of Samoan and Western youth, she was to examine the effects of culture on adolescence. The question posed by Boas: Were the problems among Western adolescents a reflection of their culture, or did adolescents experience problems regardless of culture? What she concluded was that the girls of three villages did not experience problems of adolescence as Western youth.

She has been criticized by Derek Freeman (1983) and others for her methods in coming to this conclusion--poor informants, insufficient knowledge of the language, and not living in a native house. Lowell Holmes (1987) is among her many defenders, on the other hand, in calling Freeman's own studies suspect. Her attempt, says Holmes, though pioneering and flawed in many ways, was the best she could do at the time, given her own youth as an anthropologist and that of her discipline. But it was an attempt, which is where an essayist must start and continue.

It is clear, though subsequent research has revealed a darker side to some of her Samoan story, that her text focuses on one aspect of Samoan life--the experience of the adolescent girl in that culture. She begins with a lengthy introduction on her reasons for going to Samoa, then moves to the interior in an emblematic four-page "landscape" (Chapter one, "A Day in Samoa") where she sets the context in which to draw her central character. The rosy picture she paints in this chapter ironically intimates the inadequacy of her treatment of the subject, for which she has been rightly criticized. She does, however, proceed next to place the adolescent girl in her cultural context by showing how in the rites of passage from birth to old age and her education in the process that the apparent lack of problems in adolescence reflected the easy pace and undisturbed atmosphere in the culture.

Mead tends to over-generalize, but her preference for personal stories about the girls throughout the text reflects a corollary tendency toward the personal essay. The elaborate appendixes also show her careful intention to probe deeper to bring the sweeping statements to life with daily detail. Although the Samoan story is somewhat superficial, then, she still manages to keep before her readers her central purpose. The concluding chapters, discussing the comparative effects of education on Samoan and Western youth and her final preference for an education by choice, added at the suggestion of her publisher, William Morrow, refocuses her "problem," which, in fact, is her theme. The text centers on a theme, then, that moves to an

interior core that highlights that theme. She does not mention Western youth in the Samoan story.

A third example of ethnographies before 1950 that are thematic was written by Mead's close friend and teacher, Ruth Benedict. THE CHRYSANTHEMUM AND THE SWORD (1946) was an assignment during WWII by the War Department to try to come to a better understanding of the Japanese people. Benedict focused on the ambivalent Japanese personality that seemed to pervade all aspects of their culture. What appeared, on the one hand, to be a harsh, militant, and mechanistic people was, on the other, gentle, caring, and creative.

Benedict is a pioneer with this essay in studying "culture-at-a-distance." Because she had difficult access to the field, her sources came from literature on Japan (histories; one field study, John Embree's SUYE MURA; and government documents); interviews with Japanese in the United States; and movies or newsreels. The problem she encountered was the reliability of her informants because of their bitterness or trauma in being caught in a cross-cultural conflict and the propaganda in whatever material she could find on the subject. Combined with her tendency to also cast an entire culture in one pattern of personality, her text becomes quickly suspect.

Where her contribution to the essay for anthropology is significant, however, is her artful attempt as a literary essayist to cross the wide gap between her and the people. Though flawed, her text is thematic and brings the culture into focus through the brilliant light of her ambivalent point.

The Anthropologist as Essayist: Clifford Geertz

Clifford Geertz is a writer in contemporary cultural anthropology who reflects this tendency toward theme because of the complexity of understanding the experience of another culture. Even more than Malinowski, Mead, and Benedict, he, as many other contemporary writers of ethnography, are seeing the need to focus more on individual aspects of the culture in coming to terms with the larger story. But he is a particularly striking example of a writer who reveals to us his struggle in dealing with the complexity. It is as if he forgets we are there at times as his searching manner leads him to still other unpredictabilities. In his 1980 ethnography, NEGARA, which is in effect a "self-portrait," Geertz clearly demonstrates his role as personal essayist or interpretive anthropologist as he works through layers of complexity to come to terms with issues or data within a highly focused theme. "Local knowledge," or theme and "thick description,"becomes the story of his thought unfolding, a process of self-discovery, as he at the same time discovers some sense of the political story in the nineteenth century theatre state in Bali.

The theatre state was obsessed with social stratification and prestige, dramatized in the elaborate rituals that permeated Balinese life. In each chapter heading in the central narrative Geertz re-emphasizes the word, "political"--a rhetorical device Chaim Perelman describes as "presence" (Perelman 33-40), an emphasis to invoke the essence of the argument and in the case of the essay to highlight the theme(Chapter One: "Political Definition: The Sources of Order"; Chapter Two: "Political

Anatomy: The Internal Organization of the Ruling Class"; Chapter Three: "Political Anatomy: The Village and the State"; and Chapter Four: "Political Statement: Spectacle and Ceremony"). Yet Geertz builds the theme in terms of an essay cluster--smaller essays within the larger theme. Each focus is carefully crafted to speak to the larger issue of political motivation, however, as he carefully develops his deepening probe into Balinese politics in the theatre state.

He begins the story of the theatre state with an essay on historical method and his particular approach in writing NEGARA and closes with an essay on political theory and its relation to the stratified society. NEGARA's "central narrative" (1), which I am also calling "essay," numbers one hundred and thirty-six pages, about half of the overall text. An extensive Notes section of "mini-essays" (xi) comprises the last hundred pages. Geertz says in his preface that he designed the text for different audiences--the "central narrative" for the popular audience, the extensive Notes section as additional apparatus to the central narrative for the scholarly reader. Geertz has, then, a different relationship with each part of his audience, which also reveals that he continues to need more as an essayist to tell the story.

NEGARA, therefore, forms on concentric circles, moving inward from the largest scope that includes the scholarly audience to the essays framing the inner story to the inner story itself, or, conversely, from the inner four chapters, and so on, outward, from the simplest telling of the story to the elaborate scholarly development of the theme.

The Anthropologist as Essayist: Clifford Geertz

In each part of the essay cluster the same voice persists--that of a skeptical questioner, who seems compelled towards the story--call it "truth," "truths," "half-truths," even "lies." Certainly, it is flux, which he probes energetically in his search for the story of the theatre state. But the search seems never complete. The recurring word throughout the text is "complexity." The attitudinal stance--to expose, to draw forth from the deep flux of the story the range of local detail that will tell it--is almost apologetic at times. The writer acknowledges a tentative posture, yet persists in pushing on to come to at least some kind of understanding regarding it all. The unmistakable impression, however, is the richness of that which he writes about and his delight and sense of obligation to look for what else may be the story.

What he calls the "central narrative" and introductory and concluding essays are not surrounded but open, as it were, to the amplification of careful notes, which in themselves become still further mini-essays on isolated topics within the larger theme. The interpretive process must become even more complex as he probes deeper and deeper, privileged by his reader, into the story of the multi-faceted theatre state.

His Notes, as the rest of the text, share the same stylistic preferences for antitheses and amplifications. The telltale words that show his insatiate desire to come as close as he might to the story--"but," "however," "not merely," "not simply this," "not just summary," "much more," and the list goes on--are here as well. And, perhaps, are even more here.

For example, typical of his discursive manner elsewhere in the Notes, in examining the complex interrelations concerning land tenure and tenancy, he writes:

> The argument here is not that the system of tenure or the modes of tenancy had no political significance. That would be absurd. The argument is that their significance did not arise out of an institutional fusion between them and the authoritative organization of political domination. That organization was very much more complex and irregular, and was not easily predictable from the surface features of land ownership, field labor, and agricultural technique--the so-called oriental mode of production (175).

Geertz persists here as elsewhere in the text in looking below the surface to what may not be so easily apparent but, nevertheless, needs to be considered if the story is to be told. The Notes are an extension of the prodding manner throughout and, being so, carry the writer and reader even more deeply into the story.This is not to suggest that a writer who has already come to terms with his or her subject does not invoke probing evidence to develop the point. But the tenor of such writing is authoritative or dogmatic.The personal essay is more tentative, speculative. Although Geertz demonstrates that he has carefully researched his topic and has carefully crafted the "argument," as he calls it a few times, what we are seeing is a writer who suggests continuation of the search in the interpenetration of argument and language--that in a political landscape marked by

unpredictabilities and irregularities much more not yet known may be part of the case.

In the introductory essay, "Bali and Historical Method," he concedes that to understand the larger scope of Indic history he must show continuous developmental lines that have led from earlier Indic history to the problems in the nineteenth century negara (in other words, place the negara in context). He also concedes that a story-teller can look to the isolated annals of history--"the story of kings and their achievements," for example, but to do so, as he sees it, would "generate historical fables" in the attempt to reconstruct a meaningful sequence. His attempt to reconstruct a model of classic polity that would illuminate the rest of Indic history from the fifth to the fifteenth centuries is "conceptual," not historical, he says centering on the local experience of the nineteenth-century Balinese theatre state. Such a conceptual approach serves as a "guide, a sort of sociological blueprint, for the construction of representations" (10). The essayist-ethnographer must focus on the significance of local experience if he is to speak in some way to the question of origins and ideosyncrasies. And this is done through the interpretive process that forms the personal essay, trying to understand at least this moment in time. "Specifically," he says, "I will construct, both out of my own fieldwork and out of the literature, a circumstantial picture of state organization in nineteenth century Bali and then attempt to draw from that picture a set of broad but substantive guidelines for the ordering of pre- and protohistorical material in

Indonesia (and, beyond it, Indic Southeast Asia) generally" (7).

Clarifying his essential posture in telling the Balinese story, he then moves to clear away three fallacies that could result in construing the significance of the Balinese model--(1)that the nineteenth century negara was a "museum" preserving earlier Indic history; (2) that evidence in Bali could not be applied to a complete understanding of the story in Java and other Indic states; and (3)that even in the fourteenth century the Balinese model he constructs was not an exact model for prestige stratification elsewhere in Indic Indonesia. He carefully qualifies and explores the exceptions to allow the model he finally constructs to be most efficient. Although it shared traits of the classic polity dating back to the fifth century in Indic history, it was in itself inherently local. It could speak finally mainly for itself.

In the concluding essay, "Bali and Political Theory," Geertz returns to the same theme, yet modulates to a variation. His emphasis in the essay: that "ideas are...envehicled meanings" (135), coming to life in the fusion of conceptual apparatus, or symbol, and actuality. Just as the essayist's conception finds its most powerful voice in the complexities of lived experience, Geertz's interpretation of the Balinese story is that of symbolic action. Moreover, citing mainly the divine image of the king as exemplary center of the negara, Geertz reiterates more than once that the king was not just a symbol but was in fact an embodiment, drawing to himself the central dynamic impulse in Balinese life--the fusion of symbol and actuality. In this essay

Geertz extends theoretically and philosophically the enactment of it in the political story he has told in the central narrative. The political ironies creating the theatre state pose an intricate network for him in discovering how mimetic forms crucial in Balinese life fused in an elaborate way with actual practice.

In the central narrative, as in his opening and concluding essays and notes, moreover, Geertz looks below the ostensible story to its exceptions. He writes: "Yet as usual the reality of the situation was much more irregular than this simplistic summary suggests" (26). NEGARA could be described, in fact, as an expose. What Geertz tries to accomplish is the "thick description" or interpretive anthropology for which he is known, inviting at the same time what he would hope for in this ethnography as "deep reading" (Geertz, "Slide Show: Evans-Pritchard's African Transparencies," RARITAN (Fall, 1983:71)). The act of interpretation in NEGARA becomes ironically not only what seems to be the story but also the irregularities and Geertz's search for them, his need to do more as an ethnographer than to settle for what he criticizes as "survey ethnography" and "the bird's-eye view" (51). NEGARA "turns round and round upon its topic, exposing it," (Gass 25), savoring the idea, as he probes into the interior life of what was really happening in the theatre state. The polemic becomes his thesis; the polemicist, his persona. Yet the polemic is not pushy. It is more revelatory than argumentative, more searching than strident. His unfolding narrative intertwines with the free-ranging form and motion of

the essay, which is neither placid, nor static, but dynamic and suggestive, pointing beyond the text to more that he has perhaps not yet uncovered. This is what Dominick LaCapra means when he rejects the idea of text as object, seeing textuality, rather, as the "interplay of forces." This is also what Sullivan and Rabinow mean by "the primacy of context" or "the interpretive turn...that refocuses attention on the concrete varieties of cultural meaning, in their particularity and complex texture." We see the essayist in NEGARA trying to come to terms with the elusive complexity of human experience, what Geertz describes as "the problem of meaning" ("Religion as a Cultural System," THE INTERPRETATION OF CULTURES, 109).

As soon as Geertz has opened NEGARA with an introduction, "Bali and Historical Method," in which he defines the negara and clarifies his approach to use the nineteenth century model to look at its relation to the larger scope of Indic history, he then proceeds through the discussion in the exploratory manner I have described. The pervasive back-and-forth motion of model-antimodel (Perelman 11-113) unifies the text rhetorically. As I focus on two key chapters, then (Chapters One and Four, with brief mention of Chapters Two and Three), it will be in terms of this dominating rhetorical voice and mode.

First, to more fully define the negara. Geertz writes:

> Negara (nagara , nagari , negeri), a Sanskrit loanword originally meaning 'town', is used in Indonesian languages to mean, more or less simultaneously and interchangeable, 'palace',

> 'capital', 'state', 'realm', and again 'town'. It is, in its broadest sense, the word for (classical) civilization, for the world of the traditional city, the high culture that city supported, and the system of superordinate political authority centered there. ...This is the theory that the court-and-capital is at once a microcosm of the supernatural order--'an image of...the universe on a smaller scale'--and the material embodiment of political order. It is not just the nucleus, the engine, or the pivot of the state; it is the state. The equation of the seat of rule with the dominion of rule, which the negara concept expresses, is more than an accidental metaphor; it is a statement of a controlling political idea--namely, that by the mere act of providing a model, a paragon, a faultless image of civilized existence, the court shapes the world around it into at least a rough approximation of its own excellence. The ritual life of the court, and in fact the life of the court generally, is thus paradigmatic, not merely reflective, of social order. What it is reflective of, the priests declare, is supernatural order, 'the timeless Indian world of the gods' upon which men should, in strict proportion to their status, seek to pattern their lives (13).

Before moving to his discussion of Bali, Geertz, however, first considers a larger context of which Bali is a part to localize his subject at hand: "Even if one is satisfied that a particular

Balinese pattern--say, a heavy emphasis on prestige stratification--was present elsewhere in Indic Indonesia, one cannot assume it took precisely the same external form" (8). Then returning to his immediate subject, he continues: "Not only must Balinese data be corrected for time, but also for place, before they can be used as general guidelines for the interpretation of Indic civilization in Indonesia and beyond" (8). As is characteristic of his manner throughout the text these two statements urge for locating his true subject.

And to follow suit, Chapter one, "Political Definition: The Sources of Order," becomes somewhat tongue-in-cheek, with a narrator casting an ironical mood over the entire textual landscape. After describing the unifying mythic ideal he then sets out to disprove it with instance after instance in the culture of rivalries and factions that finally gave way to Dutch conquest in the late nineteenth century. From the exemplary center that began in the fourteenth century to the many petty kingdoms of the nineteenth century the "original unity dissolved into a growing diversity; not a relentless progress toward the good society, but a gradual fading from view of a classic model of perfection" (15).

Geertz derives his energy in NEGARA from the tension that I have described as model-anti-model. The anti-model acts as foil, highlighting an ironically unifying theme with an inverse counterpart. By exploring all of the exceptions in the negara to the mythic ideal, Geertz accentuates the mythic center by showing how it in fact disintegrates in real life. He writes:

> The first, the cultural element, came, as we have seen, from the top down and the center outward. The second, the power element, grew, as we shall see, from the bottom up and the periphery inward. As a result, the broader the scope to which exemplary leadership aspired, the more fragile the political structure supporting it, for the more it was forced to rest on alliance, intrigue, cajolery, and bluff. The lords, pulled on by the cultural ideal of the consummately expressive state, strove constantly to extend their ability to mobilize men and material so as to hold larger and more splendid ceremonies and build larger and more splendid temples and palaces in which to hold them. In so doing, however, they were working directly against the grain of a form of political organization whose natural tendency, especially under intensified pressures for unification, was toward progressive fragmentation (19).

Geographic factors also intensified the rivalry in nineteenth century Bali. To reinforce his rhetorical point, the skeptical mood blending with the landscape that becomes a rich metaphor integrating text and story, Geertz describes much of the terrain as strips cut by deep river gorges coming together finally in a wide plain that stretched out to the sea. The power in the many principalities was concentrated up and down the strips with the strongest center in the fertile plain. Competition for the water supply made those up the mountain

closest to the source more powerful in one sense. But near the sea, power was more concentrated in those who dominated cross-country commerce and agriculture. Note again, for example, the way in which Geertz turns his topic from side to side, exposing, savoring the idea. He writes:

> To simplify the picture rather drastically, there was a constant lengthwise struggle between lords located higher up toward the mountains and those located lower down toward the sea for the control of any particular set of spurs, and a crosswise one among the more successful participants in these local contests competing for preeminence within the drainage as a whole. But to recomplicate it immediately, the two sorts of processes, the one primary, small-scale, and continuous, the other secondary, large-scale, and sporadic, took place not only concurrently but also in terms of one another. The 'international' politics of between-region combat were directly superimposed upon, even fused with, the 'domestic' politics of within-region rivalry; they were acted out not among a set of encapsulated states, miniature imperia , but rather through an unbroken network of alliance and opposition spreading out irregularly over the entire landscape (21).

To follow this passage one has to leave all else behind momentarily and travel with Geertz through the darkening labyrinth that ironically illuminates, to move from what seems

fairly straightforward (the up-and-down and crosswise struggle for irrigation rights) to the complications of inter- and intra-relationships. The essayist, to cite Wittgenstein once more, cannot forge straight ahead but must look under every stone and wander into necessary detours to come out at the end of the maze. He captures the political intricacies here with the careful development of his ideas.

In chapters two and three Geertz analyzes the layered structure of the ruling class and of the village and state. The tone heightens here as well as Geertz weaves in and out of what seems to be the case and what actually is. For example, in chapter two where Geertz describes the "intricacy of the balance of power" (26) between the triwangsa (the three upper castes, the leaders) and the Sudra (the lower castes, the followers) he shows that not all triwangsa play significant political roles and that not all Sudra are followers, that they, in fact, in many cases "played central roles in supravillage politics" (27). The text is intricately crafted, enacting the intricate twists and turns within the organization of the society.

A culminating fourth chapter, "Political Statement: Spectacle and Ceremony," demonstrates how the royal rituals are a "symbology of power" in the society. "The pageants were not mere aesthetic embellishments," he writes, "...they were the thing itself" (120). The cremation ceremony, he says, was the quintessential royal ceremony, enacting status of the deceased (although priests and commoners practiced it). Taking several months, with a three-day period during the burial, the ritual

dramatized the obsession with status. The tower, symbol of cosmic descent from the gods, dominated the funeral procession, each tier becoming a status level (one for the commoner, three to five for the next rank, and so on, to eleven for a king). An animal hierarchy in the coffin designs even enacted rank. As Geertz concludes, the cremation ceremony was not just a ritual: "A royal cremation was not an echo of a politics taking place somewhere else. It was an intensification of a politics taking place everywhere else" (120). With one swoop in this description of the most revered ceremony in Balinese life Geertz brings his model and anti-model together in a synthesis of irony. A tower that represents cosmic descent in turn symbolizes the inversion of it in the political struggle for prestige that ignores the exemplary center. The story begins with the ideal and ends with it but not without the unsettling revelations of the exceptions to it.

The reader of NEGARA also composes the text, for the "thickening" narrative invites only a reader with a commitment and an involvement that would make sense of the circuituous irregularities. Geertz has been described by one reviewer as a "gadfly" (Foster 165), a fitting term for a personal essayist, who would goad, provoke, or call the essay into being and its reader into awareness.

To enter somehow into the experience of a strange culture and return home to tell about it requires a "telling closeness" (Rosaldo, 1984), not easily arrived at,but it is the special role that every ethnographer must play. Geertz works toward translation of the Balinese theatre state through "thick

description," calling the story out of itself. Some of the story will be left unspoken, but the direction of Geertz's rhetoric is toward the anterior, the primordial, the place where "story" meets the telling of it. Heidegger and Gadamer would describe this point of interpenetration as writing the thing "as" it is in time, inviting its presence on the page.

Readability suffers to some extent in NEGARA with the persistent concern with irregularities. In short, it gets tiring at times. He may be over-writing. (But is this a risk an essayist has to take?) I will also argue with the wide chasms between his subjects and verbs in many sentences that seem to go on interminably. If a reader is willing to stay with him to the end, however, becomes caught up in the drama of his cross-examining tactics and begins to see how careful his scholarship is, admiration and credibility build, creating the trust necessary for the social intercourse among writer, reader, and culture in composing the text.

To read NEGARA is to re-read and re-read it. The "unity of effect" (Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition") draws the reader back again and again. And to extend Poe's metaphor, "affairs of the world interfere" ("Philosophy of Composition") to make each reading a new impression, deepening the understanding of the text and the culture. The deep writing/deep reading metaphor darkens NEGARA in order to illuminate it. The text, in fact, is allegorical, not the one-to-one correspondence of traditional allegory, but a "darkening radiance" (Bruns 6) that moves in and out of the shadows.

The Anthropologist as Essayist: Clifford Geertz

Seeing the anthropologist as an essayist here poses a question concerning the credibility of the text or the relation between poetics and science in writing ethnography. As art NEGARA allows the necessary exploration or reflection that makes the scientific data meaningful. It seems to me that a reciprocal tenuousness between science and art, which, as Lukacs suggests, the essay provides,is the ideal posture for the anthropologist. The authoritative voice in NEGARA is at the same time an expressive voice searching for meaning. This is true for Geertz as it is for any anthropologist, who would write about human experience. This is true for any writer, who must remain a questioner if the intersection of thought, experience, and language is to count for anything.

The preference for antithesis in NEGARA is strikingly reminiscent of Bacon's style and, indeed, does serve an "initiative" function to stimulate thought or action beyond the essay, but in this case for both writer and reader. NEGARA is also somewhat formal in its presentation of data as many ethnographies are because of the scientific posture. The unmistakable imprint of Montaigne is here, however, and, predominantly, because the motion of the text, as it explores, probes deeply into the motivations of the Balinese theatre state. The intricacies of the searching manner become quickly unselfconscious desire to really know these people. The light is directed inward. Yet, as Montaigne said, we, perhaps, can know thoroughly only ourselves. The "self-portrait" or "study of human character" (Tilley and Boase xxi-xxx) becomes even more

introspective, born ironically of skepticism and questioning, as the writer and reader emerge perhaps a little more aware of who they might be because they have come to know something of the Balinese. "The hidden issue, the deeper issue, the unexpected issue, pressing for our awareness--the issue that really becomes one to the individual writing {or reading this particular} essay" (Kazin viii) is that of the persisting question for the anthropologist as essayist-the continuing need to understand and perhaps in some way illuminate the subtle complexities in the eternal relationship between Self and Other.

WORKS CITED

Bakhtin, M.M.
The Dialogic Imagination. Ed. by Michael Holquist. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Benedict, Ruth.
The Chrysanthemum and the Sword. Ny: New American Library, 1946.

Bruns, Gerald.
Inventions: Writing, Textuality, and Understanding in Literary History. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

"On the Weakness of Language in the Human Sciences." The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences. Eds. John S. Nelson, Allan Megill, and Donald N. McCloskey. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987: 239-262.

Foster, Stephen.
"Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology." Book Review. American Anthropologist, 87, No. 1 (March, 1985):164-165.

Frame, Donald, ed. and transl.
Introduction in Michel de Montaigne, Selected Essays. Roslyn, NY: Walter J. Black, 1943.

Freeman, Derek.
Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg.
Truth and Method. J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) Tubingen, 1960. Sheed and Ward, Ltd., 1975. NY: Crossroad Publishing Co., n.d.

Gass, William.
"Emerson and the Essay" in Habitations of the Word. NY: Simon and Schuster, 1985:9-49.

Geertz, Clifford.
The Interpretation of Cultures. NY: Basic Books, 1973.

Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

"Slide Show: Evans-Pritchard's African Transparencies." Raritan (Fall, 1983):62-80.

Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology. NY: Basic Books, 1983.

"Distinguished Lecture: Anti Anti-Relativism." American Anthropologist, 86 (No. 2) (June, 1984):263-278.

"The Uses of Diversity." Michigan Quarterly Review, XXV, No. 1 (Winter,1985):105-123.

Hamilton, David and Weiland, Steven. Interview with Clifford Geertz.University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, 1984.

Hardwick, Elizabeth.
Introduction in The Best American Essays. NY: Ticknor and Fields, 1986:xiii-xxi.

Heidegger, Martin.
Being and Time, section 32. Trans. by John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson. NY: Harper and Row, 1962.

Hills, Rust.
Writing in General and the Short Story in Particular. NY: Bantam, 1977.

Holmes, Lowell D.
The Quest for the Real Samoa: The Mead/Freeman Controversy and Beyond. South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1987.

Homer.
The Odyssey. Translated by Robert Fitzgerald. NY: Anchor Books, 1963.

Jefferson, Bernard, ed.
Essays and Essay Writing. NY: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1931: xi-xxi.

Kazin, Alfred, ed.
Introduction in The Open Form: Essays for Our Time. NY: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961:vii-xi.

Introduction in The Open Form: Essays for Our Time, 2nd edition. NY: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965:vii-ix.

Knoblauch, C.H. and Brannon, Lil.
"Discourse as Knowledge/Knowledge as Discourse: Modern Rhetoric for Writing Teachers" in Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing. Upper Montclair, N.J.: Boynton/Cook, 1984:51-76.

LaCapra, Dominick.
(Ch. 1) "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts" in Rethinking Intellectual History. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983: 23-71.

Levy, Robert.
"Mead,Freeman, and Samoa: The Problem of Seeing Things As They Are." Ethos 12:1 (Spring, 1984):85-92.

Lohafer, Susan.
Coming to Terms with the Short Story. Baton Rouge: Louisiana Press, 1983.

Lukacs, Gyorgy.
"On the Nature and Form of the Essay" in Soul and Form. Translated by Anna Bostock. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press,1980:1-18.

Malinowski, Bronislaw.
Argonauts of the Western Pacific. NY: E.P. Dutton,1922.

Mead, Margaret.
Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization. NY: William Morrow, 1928.

Perelman, Chaim.
The Realm of Rhetoric. Translated by William Kluback (Originally published as L'Empire rhetorique: rhetorique et argumentation).Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1982.

Rappaport, Roy.
"Desecrating the Holy Woman." The American Scholar (Summer,1986):313-347.

Read, Kenneth.
The High Valley. NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965.

Ricoeur, Paul.
Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, ed. John Thompson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1976 (See, also, Bruns, 1987).

The Rule of Metaphor. Translated by Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, SJ. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977, 1979. (Originally published as La metaphore vive. Editions du Seuill, 1975).

Rosaldo, Renato.
"Where Objectivity Lies: The Rhetoric of Anthropology." The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences. Eds. John S. Nelson, Allan Megill, and Donald N. McCloskey. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987: 87-110.

Sullivan, William and Rabinow, Paul.
"The Interpretive Turn: Emergence of an Approach." Philosophy Today, 23 (1979): 29-41.

Tilley, Arthur and Boase, A.M., eds.
Introduction in Montaigne: Selected Essays. Manchester, Eng.: Manchester University Press, 1934, 1981.

Warhaft, Sidney, ed.
Introduction in Francis Bacon: A Selection of His Works. Indianapolis: The Odyssey Press: 1965:1-26.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig.
Philosophical Investigations. 3rd edition. Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. NY: Macmillan, 1968. Also, The Blue and Brown Books (1960), NY: Harper and Row.

Weiland, Steven.
"Review: The Interpretation of Culture and the Culture of Interpretation." College English, 44 (No. 8) (December, 1982):784-797.